

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20405

January 21, 1964

## GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION CIRCULAR NO. 326

TO : Heads of Federal Agencies

SUBJECT: Aging Blemishes on Microfilm Negatives

1. Background. Blemishes have been discovered on processed microfilm negatives during the past several months. The nature of these blemishes was discussed with agency records officers at a meeting at the National Archives, July 17, 1963, jointly sponsored by the National Bureau of Standards and the General Services Administration. In a press release dated September 25, 1963, the Bureau stated:

"The chemical and physical nature of the defects is being investigated by Bureau scientists as part of a continuing program of research on standards of permanence for photographic records. This research is of considerable importance because of the extensive use of microfilm for the storage of Government records.

"The defects have gone unnoticed in most practical applications. (Thousands of rolls of microfilmed Government records have been inspected by the Photographic Research Section of NBS during this past year, and a widespread incidence of defects was noted.) Although, from the practical point of view, no information has been lost, even on films 30 years old, it is considered important to learn the nature of these defects and, if possible, to prevent their formation in the future.

"The defects \* \* \* occur in several forms. Some are circular yellowish or reddish spots from one to six thousandths of an inch in diameter. Some have concentric light and dark rings. Others cause recorded lines or printed letters to become lighter and broader. There are indications that the incidence of (these) defects depends upon the

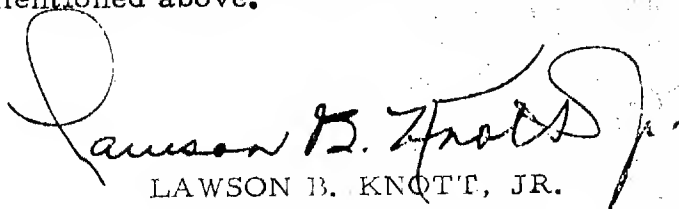
conditions of processing and storage. The remarkable absence of such defects in a large collection of microfilm copies has led investigators to a study of the processing and storage conditions there.

"Some (of these) defects have been deliberately produced in the laboratory by storing films in the presence of small amounts of gaseous chemicals. Scientists at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology investigated and found no evidence of a biological cause. (These) defects are also being investigated in research laboratories in the photographic industry."

2. Recommended Action. Pending the discovery of the cause of the blemishes and methods for their prevention, heads of Federal agencies having processed negative microfilm in their custody are urged to take the following action:
  - a. Inspections. Samples from collections of negative microfilms should be inspected promptly. It is especially important that microfilm copies of vital records consigned to security storage be inspected. The Bureau of Standards has prepared a handbook on the nature of the blemishes and the methods of detecting them. The Bureau publication will be available on or about February 1, 1964.
  - b. Positive Copies of Negative Microfilm Collections. Since aging blemishes have not been observed on positive microfilm, existing collections of negative microfilm of records appraised by the National Archives as having permanent value should be copied on positive film as soon as possible. (Questions as to archival value of records should be referred to the General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Office of Records Appraisal, Washington, D.C. 20408; telephone, Government dial code 13-36119.) Agencies also should consider positive copies of negative microfilm of vital records scheduled for long-term or indefinite storage.
  - c. Incorporation of Positive Copies in Current Project Plans. Filming projects currently in progress involving records with long-term or indefinite retention periods should provide for the making of a positive copy of the film. Since positive copies of microfilm are apparently free of aging blemishes, GSA will continue to use

microfilming as a means of publication of archival materials and to provide positive copies for use in lieu of the originals or for security storage.

3. Interim Policy on Microfilming Permanent Records. Until further notice, GSA will not approve the disposal of records of permanent archival value based on the retention of a microfilm copy of the originals.
4. Reporting. The results of the inspection recommended in paragraph 2a, above, should be reported to GSA. GSA Forms 1990 and 1990A, Report of Microfilm Blemishes and Microfilm Blemishes Inspection Worksheet, respectively, will be provided for this purpose. The data collected will be of inestimable value to the National Bureau of Standards and GSA in assessing the extent and nature of the blemishes.
5. Workshop. GSA has developed a half-day workshop on microfilm blemish inspection. The session covers blemish recognition, inspection techniques, and reporting procedure. Agency personnel assigned to inspection work should attend this workshop before actual sampling and inspection is started. Reporting forms will be distributed at that time.
6. Inquiries. Inquiries concerning workshop schedules and requests for applications should be addressed to the Assistant Archivist for Records Management, General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C. 20408. Telephone inquiries should be made to Government dial code 13-21814. Additional supplies of the GSA forms used for inspection and reporting may also be obtained from the office mentioned above.

  
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